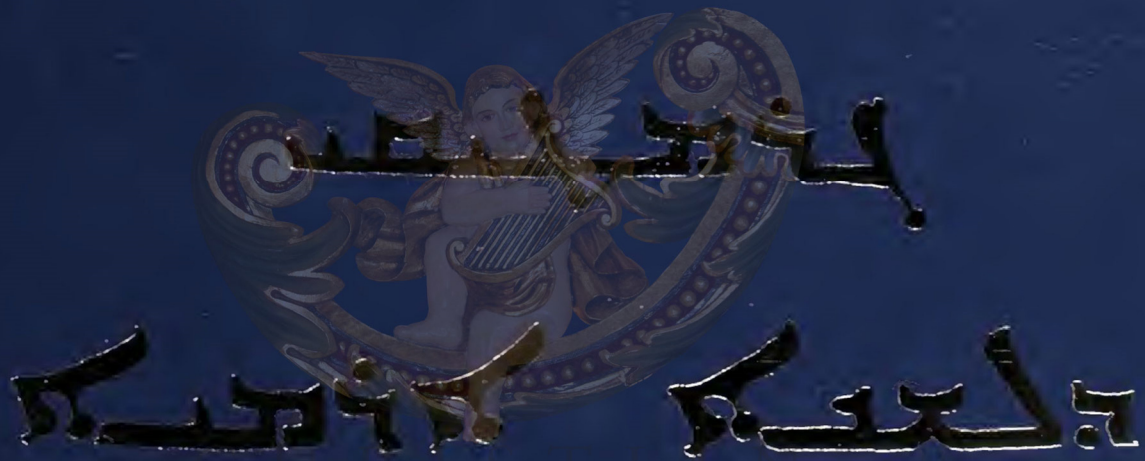


Classical Aramaic

Elementary Book 1



Michael J. Bazzí / Rocco A. Erríco

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CLASSICAL ARAMAIC

(Assyrian-Chaldean)

ELEMENTARY BOOK I



Michael J. Bazzi / Rocco A. Errico

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A WORD FROM DR. ERRICO

I began teaching the Aramaic approach to Scripture in 1962 and from that time I became increasingly aware of the tremendous need for a Classical Aramaic grammar based on the Eastern alphabet for English-speaking people. The Eastern (Assyrian - Chaldean) alphabet, upon which this grammar is based, is almost identical to the ancient form of the Aramaic letters known as Estrangela. In fact, there are only six Estrangela letters which differ in shape from Eastern Aramaic. (See Chapter 1, p 2 - Two forms of letters) The majority of present-day grammars taught in universities, colleges and seminaries are based on Western (Syriac) Aramaic. These grammars are detailed reference grammars mostly used by specialists in Semitic languages.

In 1985 I became acquainted with The Rev. Fr. Michael J. Bazzi, a native Chaldean who is fluent in Aramaic (ancient and modern), Arabic, English and Italian. We discovered that we have the same objectives concerning the need for an Eastern Aramaic grammar. My colleague, Fr. Bazzi, and I through a mutual work of love have created this Elementary Classical Aramaic Grammar, Book 1, for English-speaking people in a simple, self-teachable format. The first fruits of our labor have come to fruition.

This Elementary Aramaic Grammar, as its title implies, is a basic text and, as such, is meant to acquaint the student with the essentials of Aramaic. This grammar, then, does not contain all the details of a complete reference work. However, the inclusion or omission of certain grammar points have been carefully weighed by my colleague and me, and nothing which truly belongs in a beginners's book, we feel, has been omitted.

I would like to especially acknowledge Mr. George A. Kiraz who designed the Syriac fonts for the Multi-Lingual Scholar word processor which I used to produce this Aramaic grammar.

September 1989

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THE ARAMAIC LANGUAGE

ܐܪܡܝܝܬ

Aramaic was the language of Semitic peoples throughout the ancient Near East. It was the language of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Hebrews and Syrians. Aram and Israel had a common ancestry and the Hebrew patriarchs who were of Aramaic origin maintained ties of marriage with the tribes of Aram. The Hebrew patriarchs preserved their Aramaic names and spoke in Aramaic.

The term Aramaic **ܐܪܡܝܝܬ** is derived from Aram, **ܐܪܡ**, the fifth son of Shem, the firstborn of Noah. See Gen. 10:22. The descendants of Aram dwelt in the fertile valley, Padan-aram. The Aramaic language in Padan-aram remained pure, and in the course of time, became the common language (lingua franca), of all the Semitic clans. By the 8th century B.C. it was the major language from Egypt to Asia Minor to Pakistan. It was employed by the great Semitic empires, Assyria and Babylon. The Persian government used Aramaic in their Western provinces.

The language of the people of Palestine shifted from Hebrew back to Aramaic sometime between 721–500 B.C. Therefore, we know that Jesus, his disciples and contemporaries spoke and wrote in Aramaic. The message of Christianity spread throughout Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia in this Semitic tongue.

Present-day scholars claim that the Aramaic language itself passed through many stages of development:

Old Aramaic	975–700 B.C.
Standard Aramaic	700–200 B.C.
Middle Aramaic	200 B.C.–200 A.D.
Late Aramaic	200–700 A.D.

which includes:

a. Western Aramaic—

The dialect of the Jews (Jerusalem, the Talmud and the Targums) and the Syro-Palestine dialect.

b. Eastern Aramaic—

The dialect of Syriac form, Assyrian Chaldean form, Babylon, Talmudic Aramaic and Mundaie.

Use of the Aramaic language had become common by the period of the Chaldean Empire (626–539 B.C.). It became the official language of the Imperial government in Mesopotamia and enjoyed general use until the spread of Greek (331 B.C.). Although Greek had spread throughout these Eastern lands, Aramaic remained dominant and the lingua franca of the Semitic peoples. This continued to be so until Aramaic was superseded by a sister Semitic tongue, Arabic, about the 13th century A.D. to the 14th century A.D., when Arabic supplanted Aramaic after the Arab conquest in the 7th Century. However, the Christians of Mesopotamia (Iraq), Iran, Syria,



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Turkey and Lebanon kept the Aramaic language alive domestically, scholastically and liturgically. In spite of the pressure of the ruling Arabs to speak Arabic, Aramaic is still spoken today in its many dialects, especially among the Chaldeans and Assyrians.

The Authors



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